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ABSTRACT

Reasons why interinstitution cooperation is desirable for research and development, the organization of the Florida Community/Junior College Inter-institutional Research Council (IRC) so that interinstitutional cooperation in research and development is facilitated, and an example of a recent IRC project that illustrates each of the reasons given for interinstitutional research are the focus of this paper. (Author)

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IRC: A MODEL FOR RESEARCH CONSORTIA

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This paper will present reasons why inter-institution cooperation is desirable for research and development, how the Florida Community/Junior College Inter-institutional Research Council (IRC) is organized to facilitate inter-institutional cooperation in research and development, and illustrate by use of an example of a recent IRC project each of the reasons given for inter-institutional research.

Why Inter-institutional Research?

The findings of institutional research conducted within the confines of only one institution may not generalize to other institutions. Thus, the results of such research are seldom published by professional journals. The consequence is a lack of normative data which institutional researchers need in order to attach practical significance to their research findings.

A second problem associated with institutional research is that costs frequently exceed the benefits. This becomes apparent when one prepares program budgets that include appropriate overhead cost.

Finally, few institutional researchers have the time or resources to undertake major research projects even though the need for such is evident.

These problems are easily circumvented through research councils such as IRC. First, because several institutions participate in the research, the findings have more generalizability and a potential for wide use. Second, normative data are obtained as a part of the research and practical significance can be attached to the results. Third, since the major cost of research such as design, instrument development, computer programming, etc. are fairly independent of the number of

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participating colleges, these costs are not prohibitive when shared by several institutions.

It is apparent that inter-institutional cooperation in research, such as modeled by IRC, is an appropriate way to accomplish institutional research when budgets and practical significance are of prime consideration.

Organization of IRC

Representatives from Florida public community colleges met at the University of Florida in April 1968. This meeting was in response to an invitation by the Institute of Higher Education for these colleges to consider establishing a consortium of Florida community colleges to facilitate inter-institutional research. From this meeting the IRC had its beginning with 15 colleges committed for a trial period of 6 months. Since that time the council's membership has grown to 20 colleges with commitments of participation varying from one year to lifetime.

The IRC consists of a central staff located at the University of Florida, and a policy-making board of representatives, one representative from each member college. An executive committee for the IRC is composed of 5 of these representatives, the Director of the IRC, the Associate Director of the IRC, and a representative of the Florida Division of Community Colleges.

The IRC staff is an integral part of the Institute of Higher Education of the University of Florida. Dr. James L. Wattenbarger, Director of the Institute of Higher Education, serves as the Director of the Council; Dr. John M. Nickens is the Associate Director.

The IRC is funded by assessing each member college a membership fee according to the following formula: Fee = $1.00 X FTE + $1,000.00

Some IRC Activities Conducted During the 1973-1974 Fiscal Year

In the past fiscal year, a wide variety of IRC publications were provided to member colleges' faculty on request. Also, in 1973 IRC sold 500 publications to 104 non-member colleges and individuals throughout the country. In the seven-and-a-half month period from June 30, 1973, to Feb. 15, 1974, income from sale of IRC publications totalled $1,625.69.

Other IRC activities during the past fiscal year include:

-- A model for faculty evaluation was developed and tested Florida Keys Community College.

-- A review of the literature on collective bargaining was conducted and material distributed to the IRC member colleges.

-- The Occupational Program Inventory was revised and copies provided to member colleges. Also, data has been collected and is being processed for the third revision.

-- A review of literature was conducted on the impact of a community college on the community's economy, and material was provided for member colleges. Dr. Jeffrey A. Stuckman, Director of Institutional Research at Florida Community College At Jacksonville, used this material to conduct an impact sutdy at that college. IRC published the results of that study.

-- A study which compares community characteristics (as indicated by census data) to the community colleges's students' characteristics has been designed and completed for several colleges.

-- a proposal has been prepared and submitted to the Fund for Post Secondary Education to provide funds for assisting IRC member colleges in

developing procedures for assessing the extent to which these objectives are being accomplished.

-- In an attempt to obtain funds to develop and implement the Career Information Project, a proposal has been prepared and submitted to the Division of Vocational, Technical and Adult Education.

-- The manuscript for Articulation 1973 was completed by IRC and printed by the Division of Community Colleges.

-- A proposal was developed and submitted to the Division of Community Colleges to conduct a second articulation study similar to Articulation 1973, but using Fall, 1973, data. The study has been funded for $31,100.00 and has been underway since October, 1973. This project is scheduled for completion in December, 1974.

-- The Follow-Up Study has been completed, and the results were reported in a news release and in an earlier issue of News & Notes. Also, an article has been drafted for publication. This study has proved to be of considerable value in demonstrating Florida community colleges' compliance with HEW requirements.

-- A study of faculty workload has been completed and a manuscript written. This will be distributed to member colleges in the very near future.

-- A wide variety of services have been provided on an individual basis to member colleges.

-- ERIC literature searches have been conducted on the following topics and results sent to member colleges: "Continuing Education Needs of the Junior College's Community;" "Models for Determining the Effectiveness of Teachers, Programs, and Courses;" "Follow-up Studies of Community College Occupational Educational Programs;" "Sources of

Programmed Instruction Materials for the Community College;" "Community College Dropouts in the State of Florida;" "Determining Future Community Services Required of the Community College;" "Faculty Evaluation in the Community College;" and "Methods for Community Colleges to Determine Manpower Needs."

Illustration of Advantages of Inter-institutional Research

The recently completed student personnel study by IRC was selected as a project to illustrate advantages of Inter-institutional cooperation in research and development. First, a brief description of this project is appropriate.

The project was designed to identify student personnel services objectives and assess the importance of these objectives, how they are achieved, to what extent they are achieved, and how much it costs per objective per student in any given year.

Forty-six student personnel service objectives were identified through statewide workshops of student personnel service practitioners.

Three instruments were developed: Assessment of Student Personnel Service Objectives, Assessment of Outputs for Student Personnel Services, and Guide for Cost Analysis of Student Personnel Service Strategies.

In the objectives assessment, Faculty members and students rate selected objectives in terms of importance presently placed on them by their colleges and the importance they believe should be given them. In the output assessment, student and staff responses indicate to what extent present student personnel service programs are successful in accomplishing the selected objectives. In the efforts assessment, responses from student personnel staff members are analyzed to determine salary costs of each objective.

The value of inter-institutional research in interpretation of results can be seen from Table I. This table shows the responses by college to a question related to the accomplishment of one of the student services objectives along with the cost of strategies related to accomplishment of the objective. Notice that some colleges are far more successful than others in the accomplishment of the objective while spending less money in doing so. Clearly viewing a college's results in the context of other colleges' results provides a context for interpretation.

The cost of the project for 27 colleges including development of instruments, printing, travel, salaries, and computer time amounted to 80,000 dollars. Should this cost have been shared equally among colleges, the cost per college would have been less than 3,000 dollars. It is doubtful that this study could have been done by any one college, including only that college's input, for much less than the 80,000 dollars. This cost would have been probibitative for any one of the colleges included in the study. Even if such resources were available, the study would probably not be worth the college's 80,000 dollars.

Finally, most of the community colleges of which I am familiar do not have the research capability to engage in a project of such magnitude or the research credibility needed for results of such a project to be accepted as a basis for decision making. Stated another way, "a prophet is not without honor save in his own country."

Clearly, participation in consortia is a way to circumvent these as well as other problems confronting researchers.

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TABLE I

Colleges Compared on Output Related to the Objective,
"Students Will Know Their Chances of Successfully Completing a Program Before They Register for It",
and Cost of Attaining the Output.